



## CADILLAC workshop, 23-25 May

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# The CADILLAC Workshop, Copenhagen, Denmark, May 23- 25, 2016

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2016

## **Free thinking, free thinking about free thinking (and so on) in the free city of Christiania**

The CADILLAC workshop was a logic workshop organized by the Technical University of Denmark and CIBS, University of Copenhagen. It consisted of three days of continuous discourse on the logics of social interactions as well as social interactions amongst continuously discoursing logicians. The workshop took place at a former movie theatre ‘Byens Lys’ (Danish: The Light of Town) in the free city of Christiania, Denmark, this bohemian backdrop providing an unusual and cozy atmosphere in which academic discussion could easily thrive. The three keynote talks by Sonja Smets, newly appointed director and professor at the ILLC, University of Amsterdam, Rineke Verbrugge, professor of logic and cognition at the University of Groningen, and Patrick Blackburn, professor of philosophy at Roskilde University, highlighted three equally important aspects of the scientific enterprise: novel scientific insight of the highest quality (Smets), Public outreach at an engaging, entertaining and informative level (Verbrugge) and innovative visions for the future of the field (Blackburn). Here I will limit myself to commenting on Blackburn’s talk which took place at the third day of the workshop, May 25, 2016.

### **Patrick Blackburn, ‘The new Trivium’**

Patrick Blackburn’s talk was partly about teaching logic to humanities students, particularly at a university such as Roskilde, where the education is based upon student led projects. There are temporal constraints as well as initial mental barriers and habits among students to be encountered when attempting such a thing. Blackburn’s project seems to be to get humanities students to think critically about critical thinking using logic and formal modeling as both a tool and a medium; the latter Blackburn referred to as *conceptual cartooning*. However, more importantly (to me<sup>1</sup>) the talk was about where logic has gone the past decades and where it might go in the future. Blackburn tells a story in which the protagonist, logic, starts out from the humanities, in particular

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<sup>1</sup>This cautionary qualification can be applied anywhere in this text, however, grammaticality and comprehension may get disrupted depending on where and how often you actually do apply it.

philosophy, explores areas of mathematics, computer science and, recently, the social sciences, and now may return to its home in the humanities, seeking new insights and further areas to explore. Thus, it is really a classical fairy tale with the hero starting at home, venturing out to explore the world, and in the end returning home again. We might see the beginning of this home coming trend in what van Benthem dubbed "the cognitive turn", where logicians focus on psychological experiments and data, naturalizing logic, paying attention to empirical data. At the workshop Blackburn's own work with computer scientist Torben Bräuner, and psychologist Irina Polyanskaya, on the abilities of recursive reasoning by children, beautifully exemplifies this line of inquiry. This work combines the social scientific aspects of psychology (quantitative and qualitative interviews, theoretical models of reasoning), with the machinery of hybrid logic playing the role of a specific reasoning mechanism explaining the phenomena. One issue with this general approach is what happens to the normative aspect of logic as a standard of correct reasoning? If you go very naturalistic, this tension will build. Another tenet of Blackburn's view is logical pluralism. Now, from his talk, it was not exactly clear to me what he meant by this term, but if it is going to have any bite, it will have to mean more than simply many logics allowed - Quinean first-order logic fundamentalism is hardly a serious position to take these days. However, as is the case with naturalism, the further we go pluralist, logic loses more and more of its claim to be foundational, a role which I suppose Blackburn still wishes to ascribe to logic, assuming that logic is part of the new trivium referred to in the title of the talk, and that this new trivium will play a role similar, if updated, to that of its medieval counterpart. Towards the end of the talk, Blackburn restated the claim that the next great insights in logic may come from a return to the humanities. Even to the extent of getting insights from schools of thought seemingly quite foreign to logic, such as deconstructivism and social constructivism. In the discussion following the talk, Vincent Hendricks, University of Copenhagen, laconically pointed out that this would require that the humanities got interested in what logic has to offer. This remark points to something deeper than the attitudes to logic of individual researchers, i.e. a number of more or less conscious and intended splits in the history of philosophy away from logic. To start in Denmark, one can mention Kierkegaard's dismissal of the logical aspects of Hegel, and moving on, Nietzsche's dismissal of Kant (and almost anything else, certainly anything formal), Heidegger's negligence of the logical aspects of his two great sources of inspiration, Aristotle and Husserl, the latter Wittgenstein's ambiguous relationship to his younger self, the social constructivists failure to take up Kuhn's challenge of providing a theory of meaning befitting of paradigm theory. Although these splits by no means constitute an impenetrable wall between logic and other parts of philosophy, and although there are exceptions to the rule to be stated next, *a major part of the philosophy upon which current humanities thinking is based is not just alogical, but anti-logical in its foundations*. This goes for new left critical philosophy, existentialism, major parts of social constructivism (focus on the unformalizable complexity of individual case studies, and so on), and for mainstream thought experiment driven analytic philosophy (although to a much lesser extent now than when I started as a student 20 years ago). This should not be taken to mean that I disagree with Blackburn. Just considering the German tradition, I think there are important insights to be gained from Heidegger, Gadamer, the later Wittgenstein and others. Martin Stokhof, University of Amsterdam,

has pointed this out in several publications as well as showed us what kind of specific historical analyses of e.g. logical form could be fruitful. However, it remains an open question how these insights can be transferred into actual formal work, e.g. as done by Sonja Smets. Blackburn did not provide an answer, nor was he required to. One obvious answer, which I think has only been partly successful, we might dub rational reconstruction. We have seen a lot of this kind of work, Blackburn, Bräuner, and Polyanskaya's work in cognitive science is of this nature. In the same line, we can imagine a logical formalization of aspects of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* or of Gadamer's historical analyses. However, whereas such efforts widen the scope of logic, which has a lot of value, they do in my view not tend to significantly deepen our understanding of logic itself. The logical paradigm is usually presupposed or only changed incrementally in order to fit the application area. Again, this is fine and should be considered scientific progress. But, in my view, if we want to really change the foundations of logic this is where we should look again: at the foundations of logic. I have no idea at present of how to proceed so as not to just repeat the work of previous generations, but I suggest we start looking there - Gödel, Tarski, Turing, Church, Kleene. This does not mean that we should not look to other traditions, but our own tradition in logic is a treasure trove of deep philosophical insight, which should not be forgotten, but critically questioned in the spirit of Patrick Blackburn's amazingly inspiring talk!

All in all, I think it is safe to say that the CADILLAC workshop was a testimony to the fact that logic is still very much alive and kicking, also in Scandinavia.